

The north front of Mount Vernon

# Our Nation in the Building

The Romance of American Union

By HELEN NICOLAY

Author of "Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln"

## CHAPTER I

### AN IDOL'S SUCCESSOR

THE Articles of Confederation, under which the Revolution was fought, appear in retrospect more like a travesty on government than the deliberate, earnest work of reasoning men. The patriots of that day were too deeply moved by principles to see the absurdity of the means by which they sought to enforce them. Congress, the central authority during the Revolution, was allowed to impose taxes, but was forbidden to collect them. It could declare war, but was powerless to enlist a soldier. And being made thoroughly helpless and penniless, it was required to pay armies it had no right to call into being. Comic operas, but not nations, flourish upon such foundations.

War's overshadowing concern held the different parts of the country together while it lasted, but true to the law which decrees that virtue shall ebb and flow in nations as in men, nature saw to it that peace was followed by speedy reaction. Intent upon reaping local benefits, the sections became quarrelsome neighbors, each clamoring in a different tongue for its own rights and privileges. The East talked of fisheries and timber; the South of tobacco and cotton; the opening West had needs and interests to which the others were deaf and blind. A few years of such discord brought the new country to a pass where it was equally difficult to keep order at home or treaties abroad. National finances, long precarious, reached the vanishing point, then disappeared. The army withered to a skeleton of fewer than a hun-

dred men. Legislators, elected to the shadowy honor of seats in a Congress without real power, showed small interest in its meetings. It had been difficult to get together a quorum to ratify the treaty of peace with Great Britain. The attendance grew less and less; then only two members appeared; finally only one met with the clerk. That faithful officer wrote his last entry in the journal, closed the book, and without being formally adjourned, the Continental Congress also faded from sight.

The new nation seemed doomed to die of its own vital principle—liberty; but fear of disunion, or, rather, of the consequences of disunion, roused the States to their folly. Disunion meant almost certain reconquest by England, with the sacrifice of everything for which they had fought. Even before the shadowy Congress vanished into the land of ghosts, Virginia, leader among the States, asked that delegates be sent to a convention called to revise these Articles of Confederation under which time had proved that Americans could fight, but could not live peaceably together. With the exception of small, but truculent, Rhode Island, all responded, sending their best men, some of whom were already members of the old Congress. And this, it is only fair to say, accounted in part for its deserted halls and dwindling numbers.

As the delegates rode toward Philadelphia through the young green of mid-May, 1787, the country looked very fair—altogether too fair to be given up without further struggle. They had three alternatives: disunion, more amiable and brotherly efforts at popular government, or an American monarchy. Europe, watching eagerly, would welcome this last as a confession of failure only less absolute than disunion itself. England and France stood ready to offer candidates from the house of Hanover and the house of Bourbon, their greed thinly veiled in assurances of friendship that were insults in disguise.

Of one thing these Americans were sure: if it came to an American monarchy, they need not cross the sea to find a king.

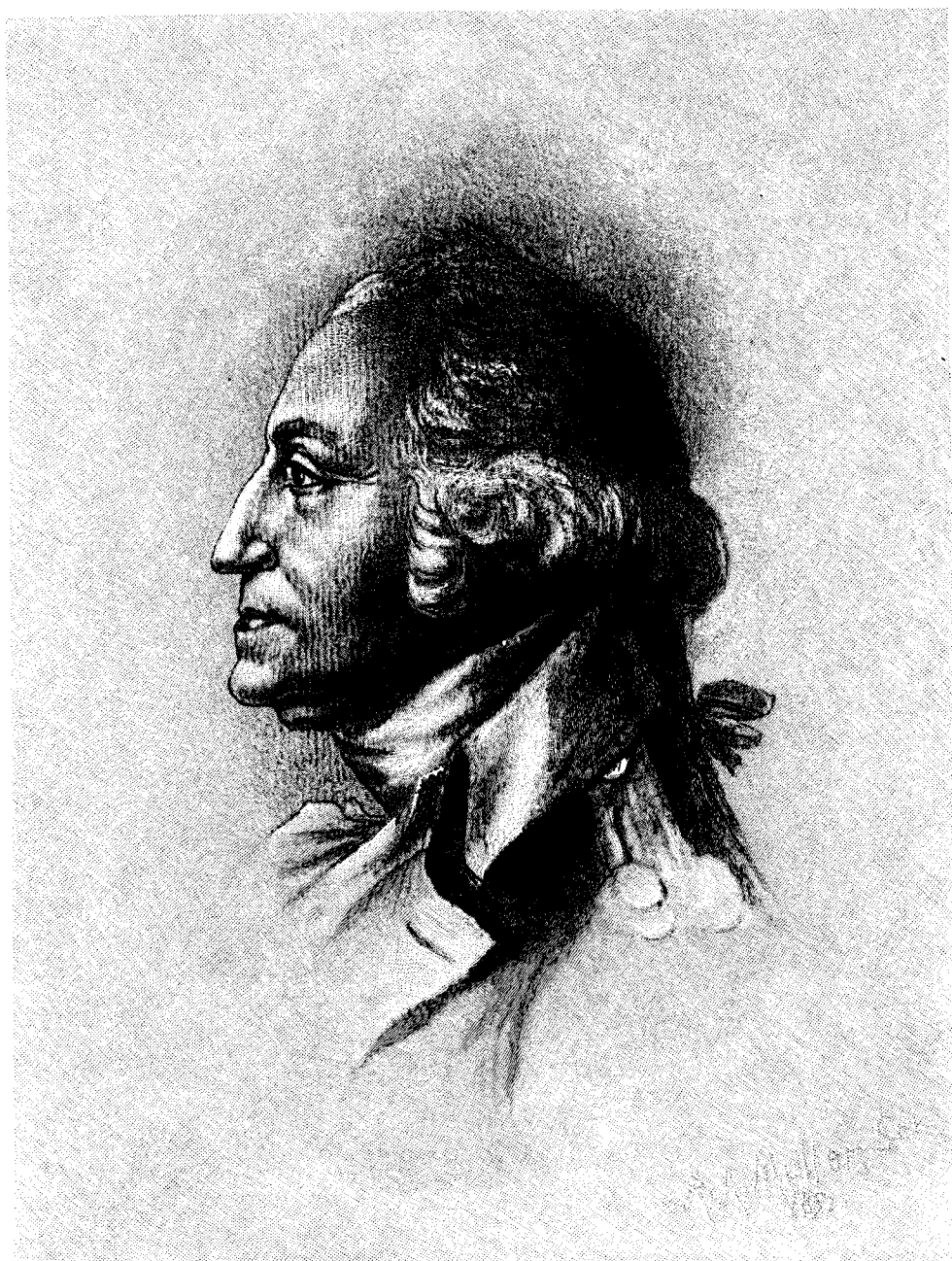
A man of their own number had been tested in temper and strength for more than a decade through war and the more quarrelsome years of peace. It was his tact and common sense that had saved them time and again while they tried to live under the opera-bouffe provisions of the Articles of Confederation. Like themselves, he was now riding soberly toward Philadelphia. A crowd met him and escorted him into the city with public honors, and he was made chairman of the convention.

After the country decided that it was not yet ready to give up the experiment of popular government, he was elected President, and in due time, clad in his dark-brown suit of home manufacture, he took the oath of office, while prayers ascended and bells rang, and the budding Government put forth all the pomp and ceremony it could muster to make his inauguration impressive.

Then came eight years during which everything had to be determined, from homeliest details of government to questions of gravest moment. "I walk as it were on untrodden ground," the new President wrote, and being humble-minded as well as earnest, he asked help and advice from many, even from men much younger than himself, with the winning apology: "I am troublesome. You must excuse me; ascribe it to friendship and confidence."

The problems of his administration foreshadowed almost every issue that has since arisen to trouble an executive pillow. There were relations to be reëstablished with the outside world; for though the States had boastfully cast off the yoke of Europe, they found themselves bound to it, now that war was over, by ties of memory no war could break, and dependent upon it, moreover, for tangible necessary supplies, like bricks to build into their houses, and dishes from which to eat their food.

There were boundaries to be adjusted to the north and to the south. On the west was the vexed question of navigation of the Mississippi River. There was con-



The portrait by St. Mémin. From a photograph in the possession of Charles Henry Hart, Esq. Engraved by R. A. Muller  
General Washington

stant, nagging anxiety about expenses of government; there was among the people an unrest that did not stop short of actual rebellion; there were humiliating scandals in the President's official family; and there was jealousy in all the various departments of government.

States were jealous of encroachments

upon their sovereign power; municipalities were fearful of losing one jot of local authority. The newly inaugurated Federal Government was tenacious of its dignity as representing all these collective units; but among themselves the three subdivisions of the Federal Government manœuvered for place and power. The



judiciary was busy establishing its functions and its new code of laws; Congress and the executive experimented upon ways in which they could work together. The Senate showed no enthusiasm when the President and his secretary of war knocked at its door, expecting to take part in an executive session, and Washington went home vowing he would never place himself in that position again. The House, still less minded than the Senate to brook what it termed "interference," flatly refused to receive the popular Hamilton, secretary of the treasury, and hear his report on the public credit.

Washington's Presidency saw the shaking together and adjustment of the whole complicated system; and how much its final success was due to his unemotional persistence in well-doing, we, his political descendants, can never know. He brought no whirlwind enthusiasm to the task, he was not over-sanguine; but convinced that the new system was "well worth a full and fair experiment," he enlisted in this, as he had in the Revolution, with all his heart and "for the war."

Gifted above his fellows, it was with an endowment of endurance and calm common sense rather than with the fiery touch of genius. He must have had a very broad and impartial mind; for even the impatience of those who differed with him testifies to this. He had a way most trying to men of quicker mental habits, like Jefferson, of never expressing approval on first hearing a plan, but of reserving judgment until he had thought it over. He had a capacity for continuous, grinding hard work, and this he in turn exacted from his subordinates; but he had also enough sympathy and imagination to understand that they might find such uninterrupted devotion to duty hard and trying.

The training of his entire life had been toward self-mastery. Lessons of obedience in early military life, the loneliness of supreme command, and the great stake for which he played—all tended to that end. He had been born with no talent for the trivialities of life, no grace of wit or social

ease, and he was occupied with engrossing cares. His deafness, moreover, made it impossible for him to take part in general conversation even at his own table, a circumstance that has unfortunately added to the gloom of the mental portrait bequeathed to posterity. We think of him as a man of stately presence, a little slow in his mental processes, but very just and very sure; a man almost dull in the monotony of his virtue, who lived on a plane of conscious benevolence, holding resentments and kindly impulses alike in leash, ready to turn them in the direction of his country's good.

Yet there are hints that under this chilling calm glowed a furnace of emotions. In the intimacy of a portrait sitting he confessed to Gilbert Stuart that he was "passionate by nature," and he was really the person best fitted to know. The little girl who lived opposite, and saw him daily with his two aides, all very correct in their laced hats and well-brushed coats, cross the street and start on their customary constitutional, wondered if the great man ever spoke or smiled; but Senator Ross, blundering upon a domestic scene soon after Edmund Randolph was dismissed from the cabinet in disgrace, found Nelly Custis cowering "like a partridge" in a corner and the President's wife "awe-struck," while he thundered, in answer to the question whether he had yet seen Randolph's pamphlet of vindication: "Yes, sir; I have read every word, every letter, of it, and a —er scoundrel God Almighty never permitted to disgrace humanity!"

In writing home about one of the depressing Presidential dinners, which were indeed rather terrifying festivals, owing to the host's deafness and the demeanor of most of the guests, who seemed to feel that they were assisting at some sort of national funeral, Mrs. Adams showed a gentler side of his nature. She told how Washington, with awkward and unavailing kindness, tried to dispel the gloom for her at least by asking minutely after the health of members of her family; and then, picking the plums from a cake, sent them with his compliments to "Master John."



From an unfinished painting by Gilbert Stuart. Engraved by W. B. Closson

#### Martha Washington

The stately ceremonies of birthday, New-year, and Fourth of July celebrations, the formality of his levees, and the way congregations lined up on Sundays outside the church to make a lane through which he and his wife entered the sanctu-

ary ahead of all the rest, grew partly out of the people's respect for him, partly out of what seemed to him and his advisers fitting to the high office of President of the United States. Dignity, not ostentation or display, was the aim. That neither

ostentation nor display resulted, Chateaubriand, in America on his way to discover the Northwest Passage, amply testified. His romantic conception of the American Cincinnatus had been shaken by his first sight of Washington, flashing by in a coach and four; but it was completely restored when he went to present his letter of introduction, and saw the simplicity of his dwelling, and that, far from being guarded by soldier or lackey, its door was opened by a decent serving-woman, who inquired his name, and, finding that she could not pronounce it, trustingly bade him enter and be seated while she went in search of her master.

The President's cream-colored coach, with four, and on occasion even six, horses to it, and attendant servants in livery, was nothing uncommon. That was still the custom among the well-to-do. Indeed, the wretched state of the roads, "marked out rather than made," rendered such turnouts a matter of prudence instead of pride. Like every other Virginian, Washington was fond of horses; but the fleeting glimpses we have of his coach, and of his own figure on horseback, grave and composed even when some misguided admirer had dropped a laurel wreath upon his brow, indicate that the same handsome white animals served thriftily alike for saddle and draft.

That laurel wreath must have been more vexing than pleasant to his sober tastes, and in the almost royal progress of his longer journeys he doubtless welcomed an occasional greeting like the old Quaker's, "Friend Washington, we are pleased to see thee," as a relief from the customary adulation. On the other hand, when the Governor of Massachusetts, jealous for the rights of the commonwealth, developed a sudden "indisposition" to make the first call of ceremony upon a mere President of the United States, Washington stood upon his dignity, and brought the governor to his feet, albeit enveloped "in red baize" and protesting that he came at the risk of his life.

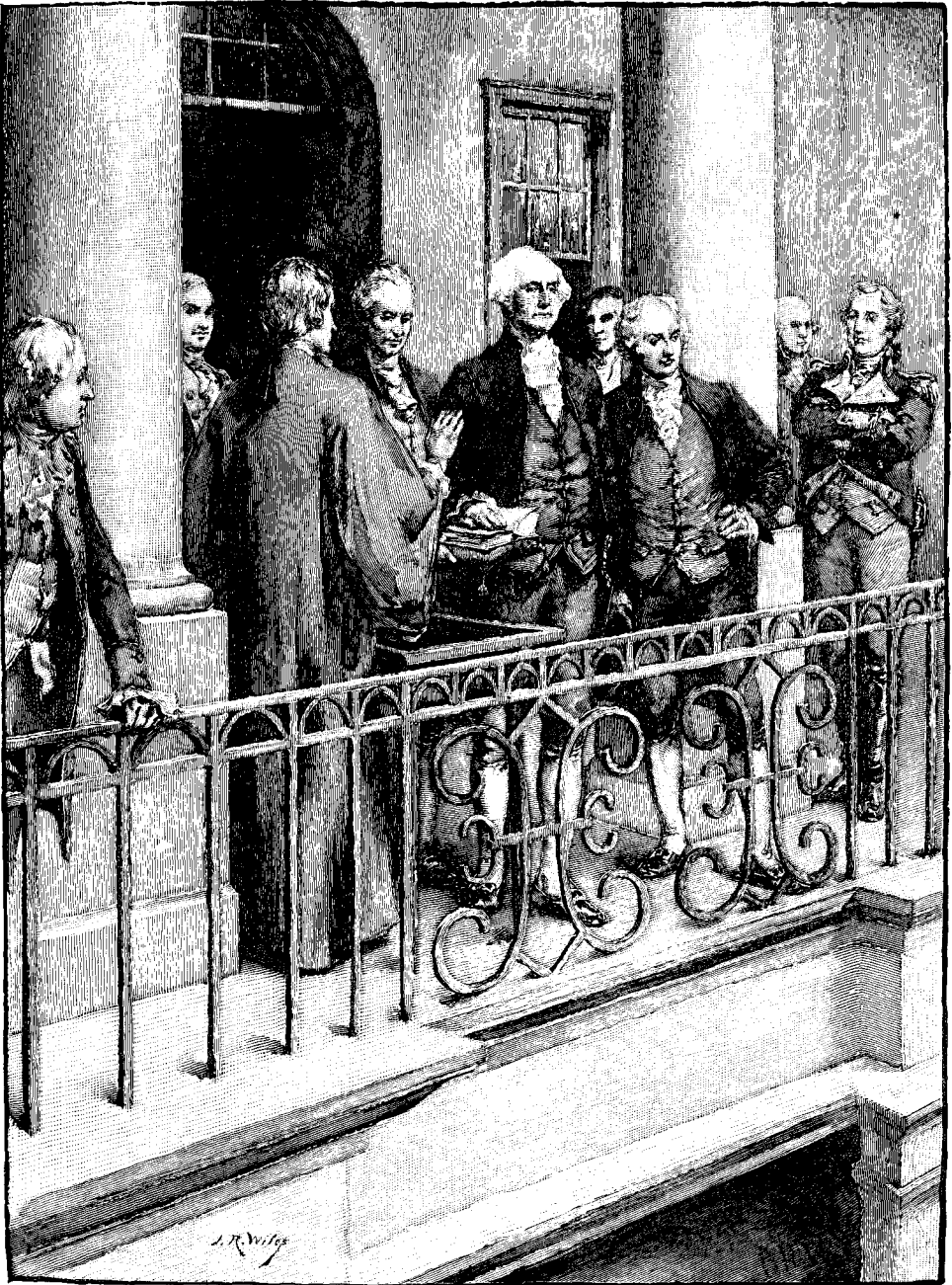
Washington, in short, was a conscientious, earnest gentleman, striving with

businesslike thoroughness to fulfil the will of God and the wishes of the majority. Every one of the sixty-nine electoral votes had been cast for him; and both from desire and the sense of duty he set himself the hard task, unfulfilled by him or any of his successors, of being President of the whole country, regardless of party.

Already factions were showing themselves. To represent these fairly, he chose for his cabinet four men who could not have differed more in character had he summoned them from the ends of the earth. For secretary of state he chose Jefferson, the ardent theorist who had done his country the service of formulating the Declaration of Independence, and was perhaps better known abroad than any American save the aged Franklin. For secretary of the treasury he called to him the phenomenal Hamilton, with the frame of a lad and the intellect of a giant, to whom it was given to perform miracles with an empty exchequer. The secretary of war was General Knox, large and showy, but, despite his pompous speech and grandly flourishing cane, a man of experience not only in battle, but in administering this same office under the Continental Congress. The attorney-general was Edmund Randolph, who proved of weaker moral fiber than the others.

Since the first duty of the new Government was to bring the States into line after years of pulling asunder, the measures of Washington's administration were of necessity centralizing in their effect. Little things and large, from the ordering of his daily life to sending troops to crush the Whisky Insurrection in Pennsylvania—without a battle, it is true, but at the cost of "invading" a sovereign State and imposing outside authority upon it—stamped him a Federalist, roused the ire of the Republicans, and forever put an end to his dream of being President without distinction of party. Jefferson, naturally enough, became spokesman for the faction the mission of which was to point out the difference between acts of the Federalists and theories of the Declaration of Independence.





Washington taking the oath as President, April 30, 1789, on the site  
of the Treasury Building, Wall Street, New York

Jefferson, indeed, was the strong opposing personality of the administration. He had little patience with General Knox, whom he called "a man of parade," and he and Hamilton quarreled almost daily upon every conceivable topic; for Hamilton, Federalist to the core by instinct and

conviction, became as inevitably spokesman for the party in power. Even Washington could not preserve harmony in such a cabinet, and before the end of his first term both Hamilton and Jefferson resigned. Afterward the President had still greater difficulty with his council. His

critics taunted him with being able to get only second-rate men to fill their places; and Vice-President Adams asserted that it was this, not high devotion to principle, that caused him to refuse a third term. But Adams was neither generous nor always just in his estimate of others.

Party differences grew until the bitterness of politics invaded social life, and men who had been friends for years crossed the street to avoid meeting, looking in any direction except into each other's eyes. Washington was accused of loving arbitrary power, of longing for the substance as well as the forms of monarchy, of lining his nest at public expense, to choose only three from a long list of political and moral crimes it is thankless to repeat. As one of his supporters justly said, constant reiteration of such charges "would tend to debase an angel." Yet when it was definitely learned that he would not again be a candidate, his critics awoke to the fact that they had trusted even while they vilified him.

They were suddenly aware that the country was to be put to a new test. "His secession from the administration will probably, within no distant period, ascertain whether our present system and Union can be preserved," was a clumsy and wondering admission that the American experiment could never be thoroughly tried so long as Washington remained President. Because, despite all machinery of ballots and election, the relation between him and the voters was more that of loyal subjects and a beloved monarch than the colder one of constituents choosing a public servant to do their bidding. Washington's Farewell Address, with its wealth of warning and suggestion, showed that he, too, felt this personal relation.

He retired gladly to the country life at Mount Vernon, busied himself in its affairs, riding over his fields daily, and dismounting, perhaps, at the bars to receive a former aide with courteous civility; within doors, happy in renewed ties, his wife looked well to her household, and chatted about the public life of her husband and herself, which she called her "lost days."

But this was not to last. Within two years menace of foreign war caused the new President to call the old President from retirement. And what Washington considered the new President's injustice in appointing officers to the new army caused him to dictate redress as the price of his services. War did not come; but the people knew from this that as long as Washington lived he was at his country's call, as ready to respond as ever.

So the months went by until in the dark closing days of December, 1799, news came that his life was at an end. Europe bowed in acknowledgment of the passing of a great soul. England's channel fleet lowered its flags to half-mast; France draped her standards in black, and Napoleon, soldier of the centuries, who craved power as ardently as Washington had desired peace, paid his tribute to "the warrior, the legislator, the citizen without reproach."

In the dead man's own country personal grief was overshadowed by deep national apprehension. The guiding, steadying influence of more than twenty years had been removed. Friends and critics alike expressed one thought. "America has lost her savior," Hamilton exclaimed. It was only afterward, as memories of intimate personal years pressed hard upon him, that he added brokenly, "And I, a father!"

In the towns bells tolled and grief-laden prayers ascended from church and hearthstone. In remote and lonely clearings, beyond the sound of bells, grief found its own expression. At night, after the few animals had been folded close to the cabin to protect them from wolves and prowling savages, little children lay wakeful, looking through chinks in the log walls at some star twinkling in the sky, and, oppressed with a strange sadness, fell asleep at last to the sound of their elders singing the lament for Washington:

Where shall our country turn its eye?  
What help remains beneath the sky?  
Our friend, protector, strength, and trust  
Lies low mouldering in the dust.



Thus the new century found the Government entering upon a new phase of its career. The choleric John Adams had been President for more than two years; but as long as Washington lived the country refused to look upon any one else as its real head.

The way of the transgressor may be hard indeed, but it is a path of roses compared with the thorny road the successor to a popular idol must tread; and when one reads the frankly expressed opinions of Adams's party friends and party enemies, one's sympathies go out to the man upon whom Washington's Presidential mantle fell. "His Superfluous Highness" was the title the opposition had suggested for him in the days when discussion raged as to what the high officials of the Government were to be called. He had great learning, great patriotism, and an unquenchable spirit; but overlaying and enveloping them all was a positive genius for doing and saying untactful things, for appearing at the worst possible advantage.

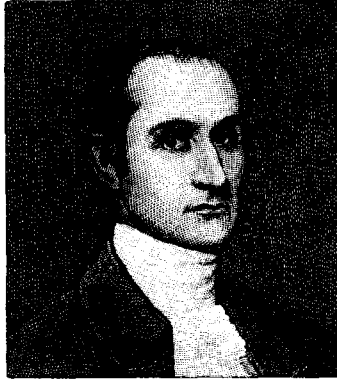
A member of his cabinet once said of him that whether he was "sportful, playful, witty, kind, cold, drunk, sober, angry, easy, stiff, jealous, careless, cautious, confident, close, or open," he was "almost always so in the wrong place and with the wrong person." The kindly Franklin characterized him as "always honest, sometimes great, but often mad." One less genial remarked that even in his soberest moments Adams was "the greatest marplot in nature." And John Randolph of Roanoke, whose tongue added the poison of ridicule to the bitterness of gall, called him "that political *Malvolio*."

The Vice-Presidency, which he had occupied during the eight years of Washington's term, was not an office fitted to soften the asperities of his nature, or to hide them. The chief duty of a Vice-

President—waiting to step into a dead man's shoes—is thankless at best, carrying with it unjustly enough a little of the opprobrium that clings to the executioner and the scavenger, necessary, but not honored, servants of civilization. But a President can die only once, and is likely not to die at all. The thrifty makers of the Constitution, therefore, bent on having the Vice-President earn his salary, added another duty, fortunately for the incumbent one of great dignity and occasionally of great importance—that of presiding over the Senate, and casting the deciding vote in case of a tie. This links the Vice-President in a manner with the administration of which he is nominally a part, but still leaves plenty of time for criticism, if he is so inclined.

Adams sympathized with Washington's general policy, and respected him as a man. He had, indeed, been the one to propose him for commander-in-chief. During the eight years he was Vice-President he loyally cast his vote with the administration when occasion demanded; but he thought Washington's talents overrated, and on becoming President in his turn was ambitious to make a record brilliant enough to overshadow him. It was certainly no easy task, even without the handicap of Adams's obstinate personality.

The twin curses of sensitiveness and unpopularity darkened even the ceremonies of inauguration for this unfortunate man. Writing to his wife about that impressive moment in the Hall of Representatives when every eye was moist, and even Washington's great self-command was sorely tried, he told her that there had been more weeping at the inauguration than at a tragedy, "but whether it was from grief or joy; whether from the loss of their beloved President or from the substitution of an unbeloved one; or



John Jay

from the novelty of the thing, or from the sublimity of it . . . I know not."

He knew that he was vain. "Thank God I am so!" he exclaimed. "Vanity is the cordial drop which makes the bitter cup of life go down." But it had its lingering after-taste, and justly proud of his record,—having, as one of his biographers puts it, "stepped from his little country law-office and proved himself a match for the diplomatists of Europe,"—Adams resented the narrow margin by which he had been elected, calling himself with some bitterness "the President of three votes only." It has been said that he achieved the honor only because a political trick missed fire—that the Federalists, like their opponents, considered him a "Superfluous Excellency," and placed him and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney in nomination, intending so to juggle with the election that Pinckney, the less known and more pliable of the two, should receive the larger vote, apparently by accident. Instead, they found themselves saddled with Adams for President, stubborn and unmanageable, while Jefferson, leader of a growing opposition, having reached to within those three votes of the higher office, became, by virtue of the law at that time in force, Vice-President, with a Vice-President's unlimited opportunity for observation and criticism.

It was not then the custom for the cabinet to go out of office with the President. Adams began his term with a group of men that he described as a legacy from General Washington. They smoldered along together in uncongenial accord until about the time of Washington's death, when the inevitable explosion and reorganization took place. But a Vice-President can be removed by nothing short of crime or physical incapacity, and Jefferson remained, an ever-present and irritating thorn in Adams's side. Adams had found it hard to learn and accept the passive rôle demanded by the office, and he evidently took some satisfaction in impressing the same uncongenial lessons upon his successor. Jefferson asserted that he was never consulted upon any question

of government after Adams had been two days in power. And he did not make the charge in the humorous mood of a later incumbent, who used to declare that his chief had asked his advice only once, and that was about the wording of a Thanksgiving proclamation.

Jefferson's party was growing, and he was its undoubted leader. It appeared almost certain that he would be Adams's successor. They had long been personal friends, and were to become good friends again, after lengthening years sent both to the retirement of private life. But as heir-apparent Jefferson was obnoxious, and the breach between them soon became complete. "I believe he always liked me," Adams admitted in a retrospect of his long career, "but he detested Hamilton and my whole administration. Then, he wished to be President of the United States, and I stood in his way. So he did everything that he could to pull me down. But if I should quarrel with him for that, I might quarrel with every one I had anything to do with in life. . . . Did you ever hear the lines:

I love my friend as well as you,  
But why should he obstruct my view?

I forgive my enemies, and hope that they may find mercy in Heaven."

Adams, however, had no idea of making life easy for his enemies on earth, and no illusions whatever about being President of the whole people. He was of the opinion that party divisions "begin with human nature," and was prepared to fight every inch of his way to a success rivaling Washington's. That he even found zest in the fighting may be gathered from a remark he once made that he was glad he did not live in the millennium, for that would be "the most sickish life imaginable."

His Presidency in no way resembled the millennium. Before he had been in office a twelvemonth a day came when the street outside the door seethed with excited citizens. The governor ordered out horse and foot to keep the peace. Mem-

bers of Adams's household indulged heroic, unnecessary dreams of a sortie into the mob, and the President himself, having caused chests of arms to be brought from the war office by back ways, stood ready to defend his home at the cost of his life, if need be.

And this was only one outward and visible sign of his inward state, for politics, domestic and foreign, kept him in constant and truculent irritation. England and France each seemed bent on provoking the United States to war, and partisans of the English and French waxed contentious at home. The surging tide of the French Revolution, sending its wash of shipwrecked and distressed across the Atlantic, had made of that great struggle a vital local issue. The country had been predisposed to French sympathy, but the excesses of the Terror had naturally enough caused a reaction. Now Adams and his followers pointed to the carnival of butchery and atheism as the logical outcome of those doctrines of equality that Jefferson and his party upheld. It was primarily a question of temperament. Largely, also, it was a question of locality, and in some localities it became a matter of religious prejudice. In New England, for example, Federalism and Christianity were supposed to be on intimate terms, while Democracy was looked upon as "a wicked thing, born of Tom Paine, Tom Jefferson, and the Father of Lies."

Bent on combating this formidable trio, Adams labored on in his unpopular way, striving to harden into custom and precedent the policies that Washington had adopted of necessity. And the faction that had objected to Washington's acts was not slow in condemning his. He was criticized for many things, but chiefly for being himself. Personal likes and dislikes played a greater part in national affairs

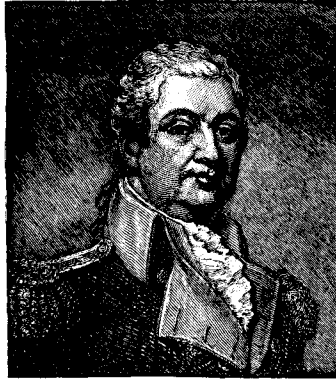
then than now, for the natural reason that the country, though wide in extent, was still very small in population, and only a fraction of that population as yet belonged to the governing class. A property qualification remained a barrier between the poor man and his vote in every one of the States, while the difference be-

tween yeomanry and gentry was still recognized, though, thanks to the new teachings, poor folk plodding along in the dust left behind by great folk as they passed in their coaches were beginning to see that all moved toward a common goal.

The fundamental difference between the two parties lay in this: the theory of the Democratic Republicans was based on the belief that "the people" were reasonable and teachable, and therefore quite capable of taking part in government. The Federals, on the other hand, maintained the superior fitness of the educated and well-to-do for tasks of this kind, and their consequent obligation to attend to such matters not only for themselves, but for their less-fortunate neighbors. Their position, borne out apparently only too well by tragic events in France, was summed up with picturesque brutality by Hamilton one night in the heat of after-dinner debate, as he flung back the answer:

"Your People, sir—your People—is a great beast!"

Cordially as Adams disliked Hamilton, and shocking as he would have found such words uttered by any one except himself, he agreed with this in principle, grumbling that all projects of government based on the wisdom of the people were "cheats and delusions." Letting his peppery tongue run away with him, he did not scruple to state—to the wrong man—his doubt that the nation could endure unless the executive office was made hereditary. "What necessity of saying



General Henry Knox  
Secretary of war in Washington's  
first cabinet.



these things, even if he thought so?" his hearer asked in disgust.

Once indeed during Adams's term of office popular sympathy was with the administration. This was when the country learned about Talleyrand's action in what is known as the X. Y. Z. affair. Little as Adams approved French ideals, he had no wish to go to war with France; and even after differences had reached a pass where our American minister was asked to leave Paris, the testy President controlled his resentment, and sent a commission of three distinguished men to see if the trouble could be adjusted. They were kept waiting in anterooms and corridors, put off with transparent excuses and one flimsy pretext after another, until even a babe in diplomacy, innocent of the French premier's tortuous methods, could not fail to see that bribery was hinted at. Pinckney's spirited "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute" voiced the popular indignation, and turned election majorities into Federal success.

But larger majorities in Congress did Adams little good. With war imminent, it was necessary to raise a new army, and this brought so much added work upon the Government that the President felt obliged to recommend increased salaries for some officials, and even to ask for a new cabinet officer, a secretary of the navy, the work of whose department had heretofore been divided between the war department and the treasury. The opposition was not slow to raise the cry of extravagance, ever potent in republics, and jealousies incurred in assigning commands in the new army proved an added pitfall. By common consent Washington was the one man talked about for commander-in-chief. Many thought Hamilton equally entitled to second place, but distrust of Hamilton blinded Adams alike to justice and policy. He named another. This raised a storm of protest, and Washington, taking sides with the friends of Hamilton, flatly refused to leave his retirement at Mount Vernon until what he deemed a wrong was righted. In the correspondence between them Adams lost not only

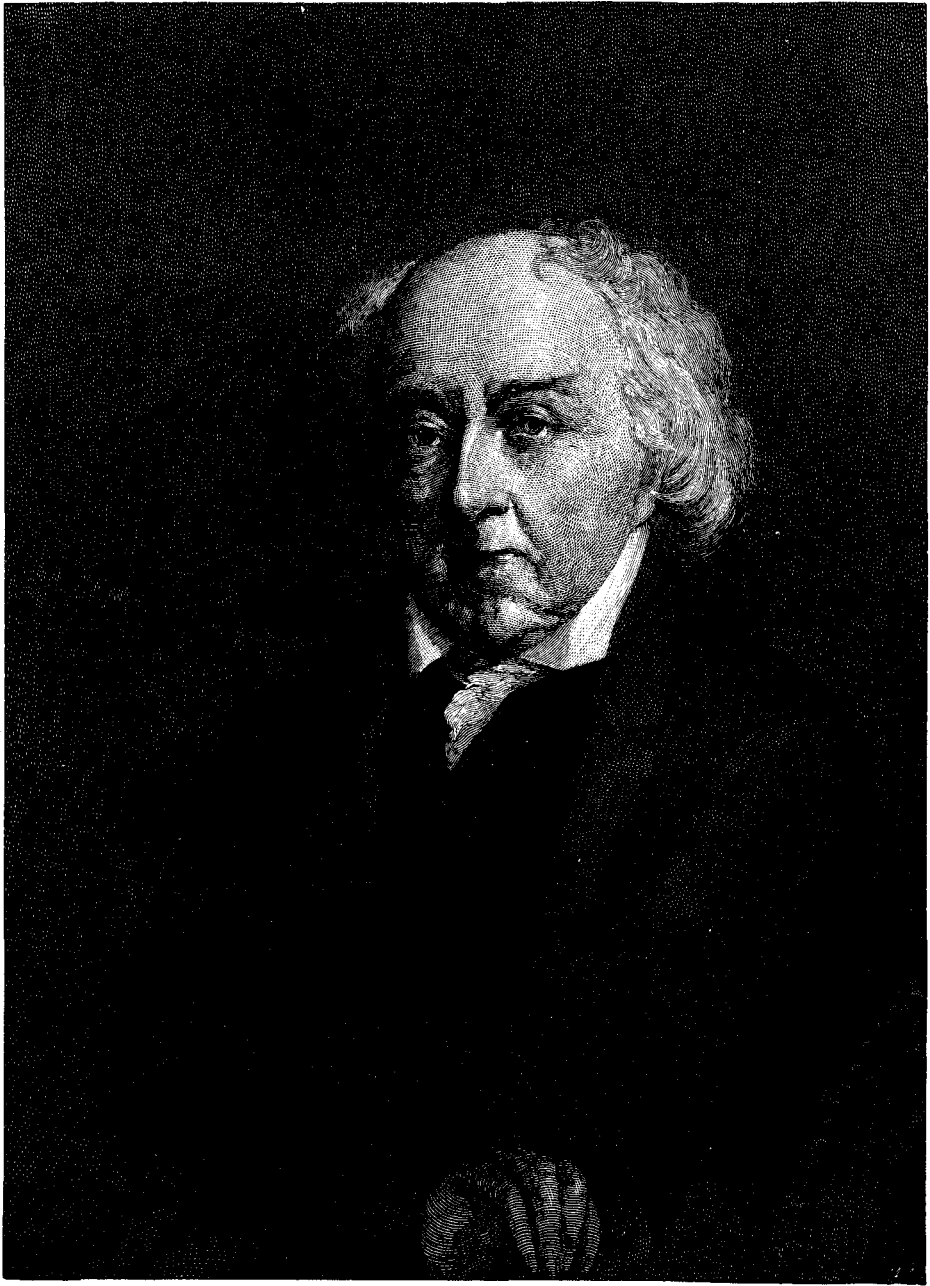
his point, but another fraction of popular good-will that he could ill afford to spare.

The alien and sedition laws, too, passed by Congress at the instigation of the administration, overshot the mark. These made it difficult to obtain citizenship, and gave the President authority to order out of the country any foreigner he might deem dangerous without giving his reasons or affording the man under suspicion a trial; and there were other provisions imposing fines for "illegal" combinations and conspiracy, and for "scandalous and malicious" publications against the Government, that proved fine ammunition to Adams's enemies when the next Presidential election drew near.

The Democratic Republicans, using all their political skill, managed, moreover, to take the wind out of the sails of certain administration measures that should have been popular by making them seem like truckling on the part of Adams to the growing anti-Federal sentiment. Altogether the task he had set himself of conducting an administration more brilliant and successful than that of Washington was ending in sad disappointment. This did not increase his serenity and peace of mind. Nothing worked to that end. Even the removal of the seat of government from orderly and conventional Philadelphia to the quagmires of the new capital on the banks of the Potomac was one more trial in his last year of office.

The opposition of Hamilton to Adams's reelection proved the last straw. How far this was due to Adams's treatment of Hamilton in the military appointments was a question eagerly discussed and gossiped about by their contemporaries. They were all very human men, and the passions of the day were much inflamed. Hamilton lost his usually clear head and wrote a pamphlet attacking Adams that the other Federalist leaders tried vainly to suppress, and which a certain Aaron Burr of New York, whose dislike of Hamilton was notorious, read with malicious glee, and used for his own ends.

Political dread of Hamilton was at this time almost the only sentiment held in



From the portrait by Gilbert Stuart. Engraved by T. Johnson

John Adams

common by Jefferson and Adams. Jefferson saw in Hamilton the brains of the Federal party. With Adams it seems to have been largely a matter of thwarted ambition. As strong a Federalist as himself, Hamilton was more brilliant, if not so learned, and he had the gift of popularity, which Adams woefully lacked. Even

in the face of a mob Hamilton could win personal support and applause. One might love him, though disapproving everything he did. Had it been possible to approve of all Adams did, he could not have won love or spontaneous applause.

The Presidential election of 1800 brought Adams defeat, this time by more

than three electoral votes. Jefferson received eight more than he; but even so Jefferson was not elected, because that same Aaron Burr, whom the Democratic Republicans had been supporting with an idea of making him Vice-President, received exactly the same number. This, according to the Constitution, threw the election into the House of Representatives. Three months must elapse before the House chose between them, for it could not proceed to an election until after the date for officially counting the electoral votes. Therefore there was plenty of time for sobering thought, and Burr was not a man to inspire confidence. He was talented, but unscrupulous—"Hamilton, with Hamilton's nobility left out." It was known that the vote in the House of Representatives would be exceedingly close. Jefferson's own account asserts that influential Federalists, among them that rock-ribbed, God-fearing man President Adams himself, caused it to be made plain to him that Federal opposition to his election would cease if he would only assure the country he meant to do none of those radical things threatened by his party, such as dismissing all Federal office-holders, abolishing the navy, or wiping out the public debt.

Jefferson refused to make any promises or to disclose his plans. Anxiety increased; and as had been apprehended, the contest that followed the official counting of the electoral votes was long and close. The first votes by the House resulted in a deadlock that lasted almost a week, and the final struggle to break this deadlock occupied more than thirty hours. Those near enough to follow the proceedings watched breathlessly. The more distant parts of the country waited impatient for news. In Washington all thoughts centered on the unfinished Capitol crowning its hill; few had eyes for the President's house, equally unfinished, among the trees a mile away. The town was as yet scarcely begun. Scattered groups of houses were to be seen here and there, few in any one place, and most of those small and unimposing. A mile

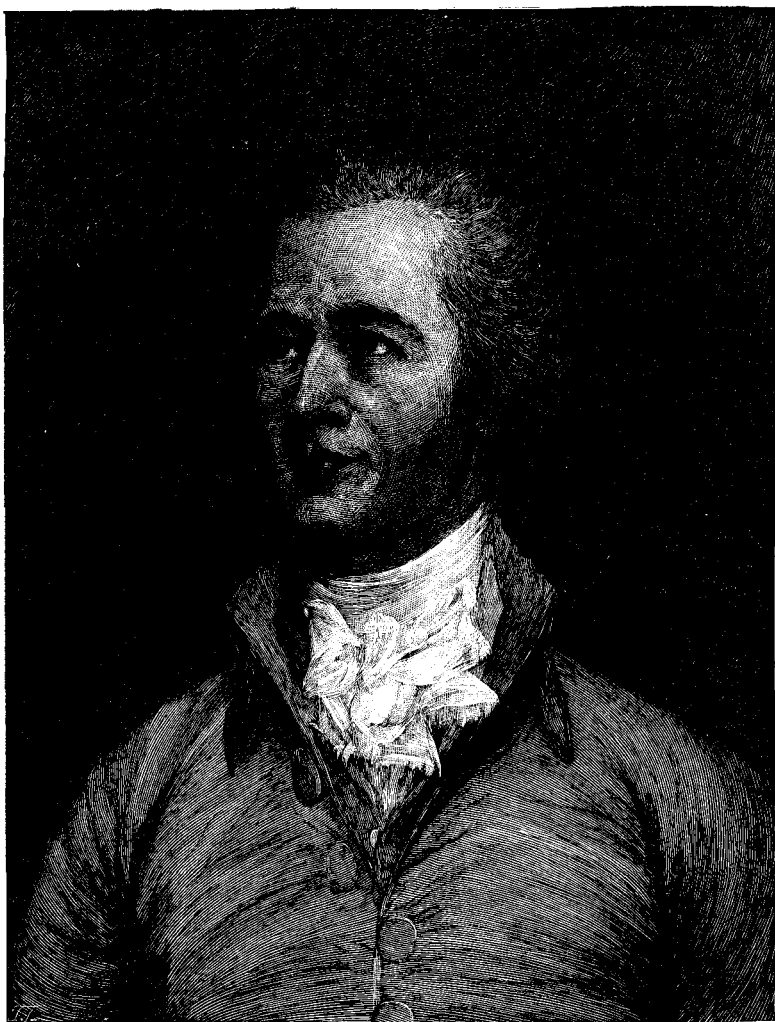
beyond the President's house lay the little village of Georgetown. Among them all the members of Congress and officers of the Government had managed to find more or less uncomfortable lodging. On this occasion every representative had been summoned, even the ones who were ill. Then the doors were closed.

"Not an individual left that solemn assembly," a diary of the time tells us. "The necessary refreshment . . . was taken in rooms adjoining the Hall. . . . Beds as well as food were sent for the accommodation of those whom age or debility disabled from enduring such a long-protracted sitting. The balloting took place every hour. In the interval men ate, drank, slept, or pondered over the result of the last ballot; compared ideas and persuasions to change votes."

One woman was present. She had accompanied her "almost dying husband" through the raw February chill from his lodgings two miles away, and watched beside his bed in an anteroom, ready to rouse him and guide his weak fingers as he wrote his ballot. Hour after hour the vote was taken, counted, and the same announcement made. Daylight settled into dark; darkness dragged wearily again into light. The invalid slept and stirred. The wife sitting beside him grew perceptibly haggard. On the faces of the members determination gave place to anger and sullen, utter weariness.

It became evident that Jefferson's supporters would not yield; but which of the opposition could bear the reproach of making the first move? It was managed by a flutter of blank ballots and skilful beating of the devil around the stump. One member from South Carolina withdrew his vote by prearrangement. The sole member from Delaware, voting blank, "gave up his party for his country," as the diary picturesquely says; and so, to quote Jefferson, the election occurred "without a single vote coming over." News was quickly given to those waiting outside, who cheered dutifully, if not enthusiastically, and the wearied legislators hurried off to their lodgings, "the conspirators," as





From the portrait by John Trumbull. Now owned by the Chamber of Commerce, New York

Alexander Hamilton

Secretary of the treasury in Washington's first cabinet.

they were darkly called, pursued by fears of bodily vengeance.

It was in this unflattering manner that Jefferson's "lurching for the Presidency," of which he had long been accused, was satisfied. But the choice undoubtedly reflected the popular will. Confronted with the alternative of Jefferson or Burr, a large majority of Americans preferred Jefferson's frank theorizing to Burr's shifty politics. But to Adams's mind even the lesser of the two evils was a national calamity.

Angry and disappointed, he set about doing all that he could during the short re-

mainder of his term to thwart the incoming President's plans. Two weeks before Jefferson's inauguration, Congress voted certain changes in the judiciary system which involved the appointment of new judges. As a matter of precedent and courtesy, these should have been left to the new executive. But Adams conceived it his duty to set patriotism above politeness, and signed appointments up to nine o'clock on the third of March; then early next morning he drove away from the city, too bitter to remain and take part in the ceremonies and amenities of the inauguration.

From his retirement in Massachusetts he exercised his privilege of free speech to lavish upon the new President the wealth of disapproval that his failure to realize the cherished ambitions and a sincere apprehension for the country's future caused to well up in his nature.

Time and the logic of events softened his resentment. Ten years after leaving the White House in such unseemly haste he had come to see that the difference between himself and his successor was one of method only. In 1811 he wrote to Dr. Rush:

In point of Republicanism, all the difference I ever could discover between you and me, or Jefferson and me, consisted:

1. In the difference between speeches and messages. I was a monarchist because I thought a speech more respectful to Congress and the nation. Jefferson and Rush preferred messages.

2. I held levees once a week that all my time might not be wasted by the visits. Jefferson's whole eight years was a levee.

3. I dined a large company once or twice a week. Jefferson dined a dozen every day.

4. Jefferson and Liberty were for straight hair. I thought curled hair was as republican as straight.

Further lapse of time completely healed the breach between them. It is agreeable to remember that the tact of Mrs. Adams revived their old friendship, that they exchanged long and cordial letters during the latter years of their lives; and on the memorable fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, when the spirits of both these brave men passed on, each died thinking of the other, comforted in the belief that the other still lived.

## CHAPTER II

### DEMOCRAT OR IMPERIALIST

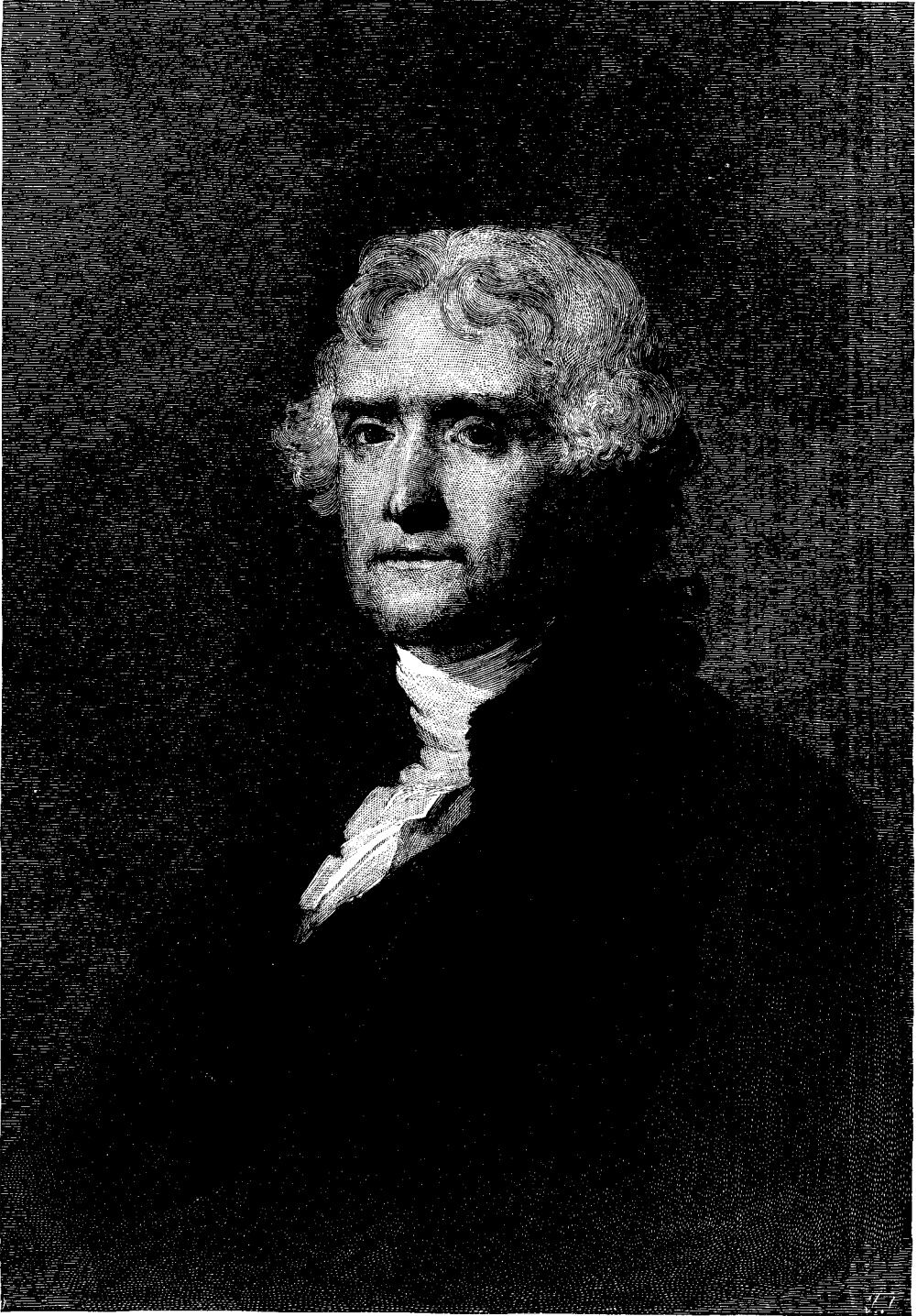
THE country waited in anxiety to see what the political reformer would do. He had refused to bind himself by promises, and had remained withdrawn upon his estate during the entire campaign summer, following the precedent set

by Washington and Adams, who held that the choice of a President was no matter for a candidate's meddling, but one exclusively between the voters and their own consciences.

While the country did not know what Jefferson meant to do, it did know that Jefferson's election was in effect a minor revolution, giving sanction to the trial of a whole brood of new theories. It was reserved for an American of a later day to call the Declaration of Independence a self-evident lie, but many looked upon its broad assertions as dangerous and its author as a dangerous man. Politics was a vital matter, so vital that statesmen whose interest wandered were regarded with suspicion, and Jefferson was known to have explored in many fields of thought. He was suspected of holding lamentably lax views upon religion. He enjoyed converse with men of lawless minds under the guise of research in philosophy and science. He had even entertained such men as Priestley and Tom Paine in his own home.

His service as minister to France had given him a large acquaintance and experience. Less erudite than Adams, his knowledge was wide rather than deep, but it was ample to afford him a grasp of many practical things, and ready sympathy in realms of thought to which his countrymen gave little heed. The sum of this knowledge was to make him an all-around, wide-awake man, given to theorizing, but with enough common sense in the long run to ballast his theories, a mental equipment providential in a President at that moment, but one to fill conservatives with deep foreboding.

The campaign had reeked with personalities. Social and political sins had been piled before Jefferson's door in unreasoning profusion, and the aims of his party had been denounced in no measured terms. "In plain language," one good and earnest Federalist mourned, "the greatest villain in the community is the fittest person to make and execute the laws. . . . Can imagination paint anything more dreadful this side Hell?"



From the portrait by Gilbert Stuart, in the possession of Edward Coles, Esq. Engraved by T. Johnson

Thomas Jefferson

Secretary of state in Washington's first cabinet.

While all this was unpleasant, it was far less irritating to Jefferson than it would have been to one of Adams's intensely morbid egotism. "Whig and Tory



belong to natural history," was his more genial way of echoing Adams's crabbed "parties begin in human nature." He serenely refused to recognize the Jefferson they abused as anything more than a man of straw, made up of all his supposed vices.

There were of course some politically opposed to him who saw no reason to believe the country in extreme peril. "So, the anti-Federals are now to take a turn at rolling stones uphill," Chief-Justice Ellsworth wrote to Rufus King. "Good men will get a breathing-spell, and the credulous will learn to understand the game of out and in."

This was the first exchange of places in the political game of out and in, and both sides had yet to learn how astonishingly pliable new theories become in bending to hard conditions of fact. The optimists were justified. Responsibility had its usual sobering effect, the liberals becoming more conservative, just as conservatives had already been more liberal than their creed. It is always so; hence the paradox that human fallibility (another name for abstract sin) in the long run brings about an approach toward perfection.

Of the fourteen points emphasized in Jefferson's inaugural address there was scarcely one over which honest Federals and honest Republicans could not indulge an honest handshake, and it is hard to see wherein his treatment of large questions differed greatly from that which the Federalists might have given them under like conditions. Indeed, in the crowning act of his administration, the purchase of Louisiana, he was more imperialistic than Adams could have been, for Adams's near-sighted New England vision was incapable of reaching beyond the Alleghanies.

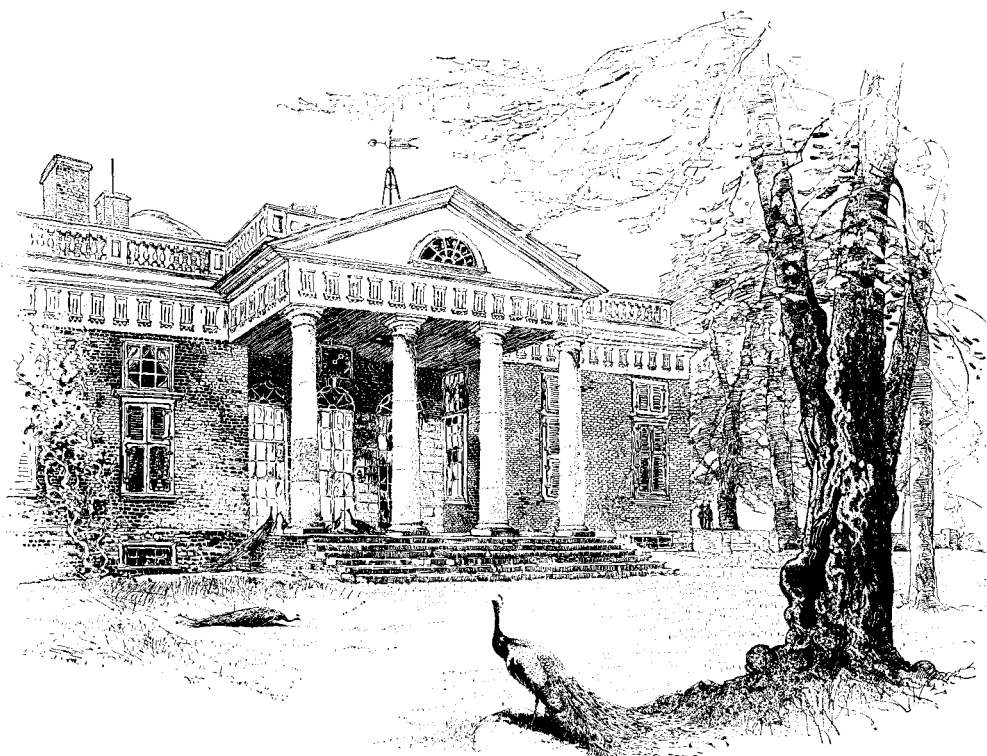
The two great achievements of Jefferson's life, for which all his mistakes must be forgiven and his whimsicalities condoned, stand at the two extremes of his wide political range. The writing of the Declaration of Independence was an exercise of his intellect, a statement of what

he believed ought to be, which caught popular sentiment and focused it to power, as rays of light are focused in a burning-glass. The purchase of Louisiana was quite beyond reason or even theory. He knew it by inspiration to be the will of destiny in regard to his country. His democracy was always a matter of the head rather than of the heart; and to his honor be it said that whenever his carefully cultivated principles bumped in painful collision against his sense of what was fitting for a great nation, he threw theory to the winds and followed instinct rather than be hampered by the kind of consistency that Emerson called the hobgoblin of little minds.

Jefferson's first acts as President were not at all alarming. Far from turning out all Federal office-holders, he "proceeded with moderation," appointing party friends only as the terms of Federals expired; and he returned to the rule observed by Washington, which Adams was inclined to violate, of refusing to appoint his own relatives, no matter what their politics. Justly enough, he resented Adams's "midnight" appointment of new judges. "So far as they are during pleasure," Jefferson wrote, "I shall not consider the persons named as candidates," "nor pay the respect of notifying them that I consider what is done a nullity."

Adams had tried in this way to safeguard the reorganized judiciary. It was an act justifiable only on the plea of extreme necessity, as was the beguiling offer made to Jefferson when his election hung in doubt in the House of Representatives. But, after all, morality is not a fixed quantity: had Jefferson been the unsafe man Adams feared, the country would have been in danger, and Adams justified in any measure he could take to lessen it. Actuated by the highest motives, but without the excuse of necessity, these acts degenerate into stupid political blunders that the white intensity of Adams's patriotism is enough to burn from the record.

Adams's hasty departure had already shorn inauguration day of half its cere-



Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson

monial importance. The Democratic President further curtailed its splendors, and for some time kept official society in a flutter over details of his Republican reforms. From the distance of a century we are forced to admire the wit and skill with which Jefferson thus managed to divert attention from more serious issues until he could get his bearings and measure the forces for and against him. Some of his minor reforms, like his "Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive,"<sup>1</sup> which promulgated the rules of "*pele*

<sup>1</sup>Extract from "Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive":

4th. Among the members of the Diplomatic Corps, the Executive Government, in its own principles of personal and national equality, considers every Minister as the representative of his Nation, and equal to every other without distinction of grade.

5th. At dinners, in public or private, and on all other occasions of social intercourse, a perfect equality exists between the persons composing the company, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office.

6th. To give force to the principles of equality or *pele mele*, and prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy, the members of the Executive, at their own houses, will adhere to the ancient usage of their ancestors—gentlemen *en masse* giving place to ladies *en masse*.

*mele*" and wiped the social slate free from title and precedence with one mighty Republican sweep, roused a buzzing like angry bees among diplomats, and even threatened international trouble. But, yielded at the opportune moment, they could be bartered for more important concessions.

In the early days of Washington's Presidency questions of social usage had required speedy settlement. Washington had appealed to a number of leaders, among them Adams and Hamilton, Jay and Madison, for help in making rules of official conduct, begging rather wistfully to be told whether one day in seven was not enough to set apart for visits of mere ceremony, and one hour of each day—eight o'clock A.M., which was a favorite time, apparently, with the Father of his Country—to receive visitors who came on business. Might he himself make visits not as President, but as a private citizen? What must he do about dinner-parties, etc.?

Little by little the code of manners had defined itself. Mrs. Washington held her

Friday evening levees; and at stated intervals the President gathered companies about his table for those oppressively silent dinners—"the most solemn I ever sat at," a participant feelingly confided to his diary.

Adams's reply to the President's inquiries had bristled with chamberlains and aides-de-camp. He had reminded his chief that the royal office in Poland was a "mere shadow" compared with the dignity of the American President; had mentioned the dogeship of Venice and the stadtholder of Holland slightly in the same connection, and had warned Washington that "if the state and pomp essential to this great department are not in good degree preserved, it will be in vain for America to hope for consideration with foreign powers."

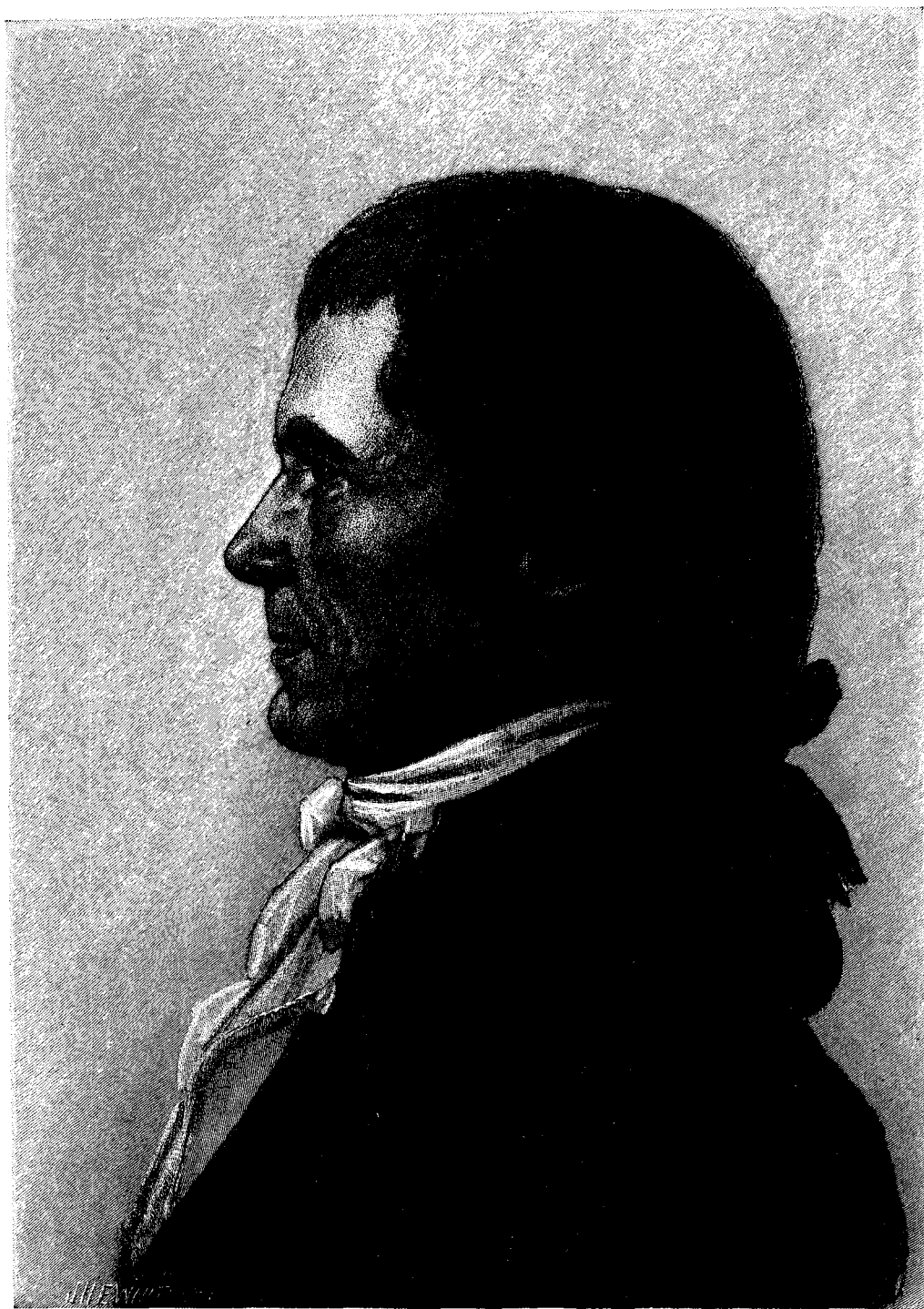
So when he came into the Presidency, the stately observances of Washington's day were not allowed to lapse. Even transplanting the seat of government from Philadelphia to the unfinished town on the Potomac had served only to jolt and rather humorously distort them. With the chill of new plaster pervading the executive residence, Mrs. Adams despaired of getting sufficient wood cut either for love or money from the growing trees surrounding it to fill its yawning fireplaces and dispel the dampness. She put the great audience-room to the only use its unfinished condition permitted—drying the Presidential linen. Looking from its unglazed windows over the small and scattered groups of houses, all that had yet materialized of L'Enfant's imposing plan, she reflected that their inhabitants must subsist "like fishes, by eating each other." But she played her rôle of President's lady with spirit, maintained her hours for levees, and answered the "fishes," when they came to call, that she thought the new capital had "a beautiful situation."

It had indeed. Half-way between Maine and Georgia, at that time our northern and southern boundaries; inland, but at the head of tide-water on a noble stream; planned along generous lines to cover a succession of hills upon which

a city once built could not be hid, it was, and seemed likely to remain, fairly central. Even the most optimistic patriot could not foresee how far that mythical reality, the center of population, was to travel westward decade by decade during the next century, unimpeded by war or misfortune, until the city on the Potomac was left upon the edge of our great country.

Jefferson's imagination was vivid enough to see the city of the future, with its avenues and stately buildings, in Major L'Enfant's plan; but it is also quite possible that he saw the absurdity of trying to keep up the fiction of present ceremony in a capital whose houses were non-existent and whose thoroughfares were marvels of ruts and bad drainage. Personally of very simple habits, both inclination and conviction urged him to dispense as much as possible with the mummerly of his office. The story that he rode to his inauguration, tied his horse to the picket-fence at the foot of the Capitol, and mounted the steps to take his oath of office has been relegated time and again to the limbo of lost, but cherished, fable. Even the knock-down objection that there was no fence fails to keep it there. The bit of truth at the bottom lies in the curtailed ceremonies of the day, and in the fact that soon after he became President he changed the custom of making a speech on the opening of Congress, prefaced by "a stately cavalcade attending the President to the Capitol," and followed by an equally stately procession of Congressmen and Senators in coaches back again to the President's house with answering addresses. Jefferson instituted the simpler method of sending Congress a written message, a custom that endured for over a century, until another Democrat chose to return to the more ancient usage of direct speech. The change, however, had neither political nor spiritual significance. It was purely physical. The taunt of Jefferson's critics that he never made a speech is almost literally true. An infirmity that caused his voice "to sink in his throat" when he attempted a public





From the crayon portrait by St. Mémin. Engraved by J. H. F. Whitney. Copyrighted by Thomas Marshall Smith

Chief-Justice John Marshall

address at once explains it and absolves him from criticism.

In ordinary conversation he was ready

enough. Winfield Scott, who observed him with the critical attention of ambitious youth toward famous maturity,

thought him "an incessant talker." From others we learn that his conversation, while not brilliant, flowed on, thoughtful and agreeable, seasoned with old-fashioned compliment in the style of Virginia gentlemen of pre-Revolutionary days. He was not handsome, if we may trust Tucker's description of him as "tall, thin, and raw-boned," with "red hair, a freckled face, and pointed features," but his height—more than six feet two—and his rather loose-jointed carriage made him a marked man in any assembly. In dress he was governed by comfort rather than by elegance. "Pride costs more than hunger, thirst, and cold," he used to say; and as he lived in an epoch that witnessed a mighty revolution in men's clothing as well as in men's government, monarchy's queues and velvets giving way to short hair and the useful, ungainly pantaloons, only the watchfulness of his body-servant saved him from unbelievable anachronisms of costume. Indeed, in later life, at Monticello, where this Democrat ruled absolute king, he often wore the garments of several different periods together, like superimposed geologic strata, or the historic remains in the Roman Forum.

Left a widower many years before he became President, he lived in the White House in curtailed bachelor state, visited occasionally by his married daughters. His family affections were very strong, and frequent letters to them bore a recurring burden of questions about all things alive at Monticello, from his grandchildren to his cabbages, interspersed with good advice, reports on politics, or the wonders of science, and gallantly attempted descriptions of the fashions, which he hoped were detailed and accurate enough to serve as working models. When the White House was in need of a hostess, warm-hearted Mrs. Madison, wife of his secretary of state, discharged that duty for him.

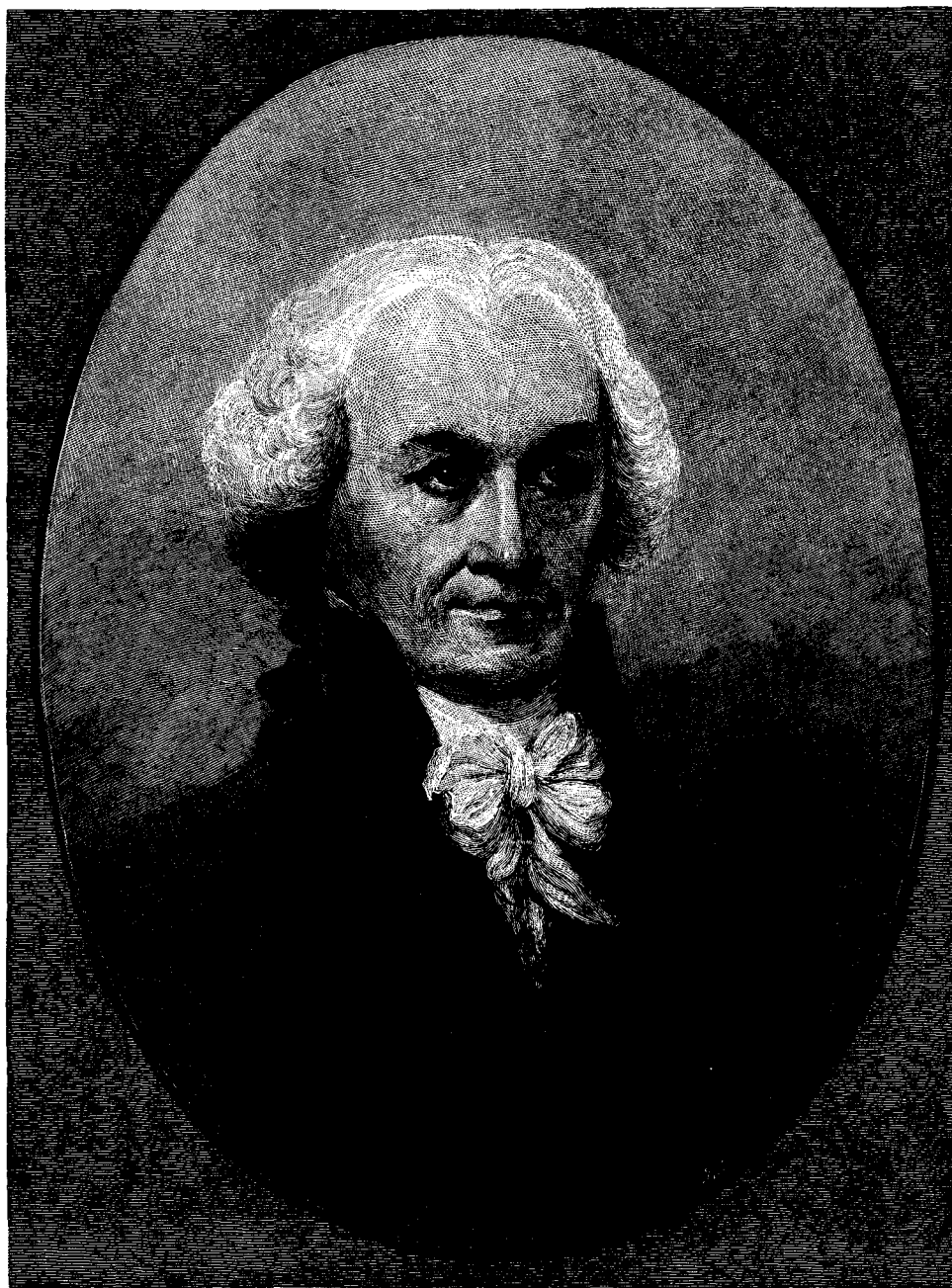
One of Jefferson's earliest reforms, in the interest of economy of time, was to do away with levees. He announced that he would receive publicly only twice a year, on January first and the Fourth of July.

The ladies of Washington, loath to give up what little courtly elegance Mrs. Adams's weekly drawing-rooms had lent to the embryo capital, tried to coerce him by appearing in force at the usual time. Told that he was not at home, they waited. He returned at last, and received them readily and courteously enough, but just as he was, dusty from his ride, without a word of apology for his appearance. His perfect unconcern gave them to understand unmistakably that he would not change his plan, no matter how often their petticoat invasion might be repeated, and they retired beaten, but laughing at his tact and their own discomfort.

He refused to make journeys of ceremony, although both Washington and Adams had done so, pointing out that Washington's action was no precedent, since his place in the affections of his countrymen set him apart from all others, and indulging in a covert fling at Adams: "I confess that I am not reconciled to the idea of a Chief Magistrate parading himself through the several States as an object to the public eye, and in quest of an applause which to be valuable must be purely voluntary."

He strove to be a consistent Democrat; to keep the business approaches to the White House wide open, but to close those of merely social character, believing politics, not society, to be the duty for which he was elected. And politics was no child's play. Reversing positions in the game of out and in had not materially bettered affairs. Public irritation against England and France was still rife, though somewhat changed in character. Those two countries were now at war, and, striking at each other's trade, were dealing staggering blows upon our commerce.

The United States had built up a successful trade with the West Indies. England now decreed that neutral ships must not carry goods from the West Indies to France or to any European country that sided with France in the quarrel. France, on her part, forbade neutral vessels to enter British harbors. Both combatants



From the miniature by John Trumbull in the Yale School of Fine Arts. Engraved by T. Johnson.

Chief-Justice Oliver Ellsworth

seized vessels they caught disobeying these orders, and American shipping suffered now from one and now from the other until the battle of Trafalgar ended French activity at sea. Afterward England continued her seizures in a manner even more galling to America, stopping

our vessels wherever she found them, and impressing our sailors into her navy on the charge that they were British subjects. In 1807 the British ship *Leopard* capped the affront by overhauling the frigate *Chesapeake* at our very doors, just outside the port of Norfolk, Virginia. On the



refusal of the American commander to give up the men demanded, the *Leopard* opened fire, killing three and wounding eighteen of her crew.

The wrath of the United States knew no bounds, but it had to be satisfied with a half-hearted apology from England, for the American navy, intrepid in spirit, was lamentably weak in numbers. Driven to some kind of retaliation, the administration hit upon the policy of the Embargo, which resulted in greater injury to ourselves than to Great Britain. Theoretically such a decree, forbidding vessels to sail from America to any foreign port, could not fail to cripple England's immense trade with this country. Congress and the administration merely overlooked the fact that while England's commerce might be crippled, ours would inevitably be killed, since we were much more dependent upon Great Britain in the matter of trade than Great Britain was upon us.

New England, stronghold of Federalism and center of the American shipping industry, waxed derisive and voluble against what it called the "terrapin policy" of the Embargo, comparing it to the tactics of the lowly animal that pulls feet and head within its shell when struck, instead of showing fight. Jefferson was harshly criticized for all the policies and shortcomings of his administration. His popularity seemed for a time to wane; but this was only temporary, and he was reëlected at the end of his first term by what has since become known in political language as a landslide, the Federal candidate receiving only fourteen electoral votes.

He was delighted, and claimed that Federalism had come over *in toto* to the Republican party. The truth is that by a lucky combination of circumstances the people were able just then to eat their cake and have it, too. Professing the "political metaphysics" of democracy, as Chief-Justice Marshall styled it, they reaped the benefit of measures that would have done credit to the reign of an emperor. At the moment Jefferson was reëlected the issues freshest in public memory were those picturesque and undemo-

cratic ones for which his administration was to live in history—the war with Tripoli, the Oregon explorations, and the purchase of Louisiana.

Fortunately for his country, his republicanism worked only intermittently, and served as a check, not a deterrent, to those empire-wide schemes toward which his mind gravitated by nature. His conception of the office of President left him powerless to protect a few shade-trees growing near the Executive Mansion. His party's conception of states' rights made it difficult to keep a wagon-road in order if it crossed the border-line between two commonwealths. Yet he found no difficulty in reading his title clear to purchase the third of a continent, or to fit out at government expense an expedition to cross the whole of North America and clear up mysteries in uncharted regions not then owned by the United States. Nor did his distrust of a navy prevent his sending our very young one half around the world on police duty that the nations of Europe refused to undertake.

The navy was one of the bugbears of the Democratic Republicans. They called it the Great Beast with the Great Belly, because of its cost; and they had much to say about the arrogance navies breed in nations. Jefferson cherished a scheme, based on something he once read about Venice, for keeping a nice little one exclusively for coast defense, safe and dry under cover in times of peace; yet his first act as President, in gallant disregard of principle, was giving consent to the spectacular sea-fights known as the war with Tripoli.

On the whole round globe there is no spot so adapted to the trade of piracy as that portion of the coast of Africa upon which Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, and Morocco crouched for years to prey upon the rich prizes of the sea. Dominating the Strait of Gibraltar, that needle's eye through which three fourths of the commerce of the world must pass, with a desert behind them into which to retreat with their plunder, and with the waves of two seas constantly wafting ships to-



ward their shores, they had only to gather in what fortune brought them. Everything it brought turned to profit, men as well as goods; for sailors made sturdy slaves, or, if not fit for slaves, could be held for ransom.

Through their bloody hands the Middle Ages reached out and took toll of the nineteenth century; and nothing so links the new United States of America with a far-off undesirable past as that for sixteen years our sailors were made slaves, our American officers languished in captivity, and our country, like the rest of the civilized world, paid tribute to "the pests of Christendom." It remained for our young country to bring this state of things to an end, for the strong trading nations of Europe had one and all submitted, a fact which seems incredible unless there is truth in the dark hint that England, strongest of them all, was not ill pleased to have these cutthroats aid her by attacking her enemies. In other words, that "Barbary piracy was a protective tax in favor of British bottoms."

The pirates plundered only where plundering was worth while; it may have been with a gleam of pride as well as of wrath, accepted as a sort of commercial and naval accolade, that this country learned in the autumn of 1785 that the Algerines had declared war upon the United States and captured two of our ships. Some of our statesmen were frankly not sorry. "The more we are ill treated abroad, the more we shall be united at home," wrote John Jay, who was at the time secretary under Congress for foreign affairs. "Besides, as it may become a nursery for seamen, and lay the foundations for a respectable navy, it may eventually prove more beneficial than otherwise." Jay evidently did not view a navy with Jefferson's distrust.

In the course of ten years over one hundred Americans had been made slaves or held for ransom, and over a dozen vessels had struck their colors to the pirates. While Washington was President a treaty was concluded with Algiers, agreeing to pay a large sum for the release of all

Americans in captivity, and promising further tribute if our ships were left alone. "The terms," wrote Oliver Ellsworth, "though humiliating, are as moderate as there was reason to expect."

Other negotiations were held with other members of the piratical band, and it was to one of these that John Adams referred when he said that the Sultan of Morocco had made an easy treaty with us "because we were Unitarians," meaning that as a nation we made no official statement of belief in the Trinity.

But though they might regard us as coreligionists, the demands of our rapacious friends grew faster than our inclination to fulfil them. In 1800, Tripoli asked for a frigate or brig, and insisted that Captain Bainbridge carry the Algerine ambassador to Constantinople with his goods and his presents, a bit of service that went sorely against the grain of the American commander. Next year the Bey of Tunis demanded forty cannon and ten thousand stand of arms. These not being forthcoming, Tripoli declared war, and before Jefferson had been President two months he found himself despatching Admiral Dale to the other side of the world with two thirds of our available navy—four of the six ships then in commission—to administer to the Barbary pirates a well-deserved trouncing. It was done in a manner so thorough and salutary that the Pope of Rome, officially bound to consider Jefferson and his countrymen heretics, publicly declared that they had done more for Christendom against these plagues of the sea than the whole of Europe combined.

The audacity of our infant navy in taking up a challenge refused by all Christendom is equaled only by the incredible picturesqueness of this war with Tripoli, which seems to have been invented by history expressly to lure boys in heart and boys in years on through less readable pages of its musty volumes.

Admiral Dale held a commission to chase corsairs,—the obsolete name in itself gives a thrill,—but those were the leisurely days of sails. He was despatched

upon his errand in 1801; it was 1803 before actual fighting took place. Meanwhile pirates had been sighted and chased, and had given chase, but escaped into the shelter of harbors where Americans could not follow them. The Americans always followed to the verge of safety. On November 1, 1803, the narrow line of safety was crossed by that same Captain William Bainbridge who had so unwillingly carried the Algerine ambassador to Constantinople. In his frigate the *Philadelphia* he pursued a corsair into the very harbor of Tripoli, found himself suddenly upon a sunken rock, was surrounded by a cormorant throng of the enemy's smaller boats, and captured, his crew and officers being plundered even of their clothing before they reached the land. All were dispersed into slavery; Bainbridge himself, kept a prisoner in Tripoli, had the torment of seeing his ship refitted under her new owners. Somehow he found means of writing letters. In one, sent out at random in the hope it might fall into helpful hands, he outlined the possibility of recapturing the *Philadelphia* before she could leave the harbor.

His hope was justified. Chance—or should it have another name?—carried the letter to the right man for the task, and Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, in command of the little *Intrepid*, a captured prize of only forty or fifty tons, overloaded with men and undersupplied with food, sailed to the rescue. The insufficient food they had was of poor quality, mainly hardtack, water, and spoiled salt meat; but high spirits and good weather went far to overcome these drawbacks.

Nearing the harbor of Tripoli on a moonlight night, they sighted the *Philadelphia* lying a mile within the entrance. Her masts were not yet all in place, but her guns, as events proved, were loaded and shotted. Near her lay two corsairs, with a few gunboats and smaller craft. Decatur gave his commands. The *Philadelphia* was to be boarded, her spar-deck first taken, then her main-deck. After that she must be given to the flames, since she was in no condition to put to sea.

True to her name, the little *Intrepid* steered directly for her mark, most of Decatur's men lying concealed, with orders not to show themselves until the signal for action was given. When hailed by those aboard the *Philadelphia*, she answered that she belonged to Malta, was engaged in trade, had lost her anchors in a recent storm, and wished to lie near the frigate until morning. Decatur stood beside the pilot and embroidered upon this theme, prompting him with many and ingenious details about the cargo and the heavy weather experienced, as with each phrase the *Intrepid* edged nearer and nearer the exact spot where she would be most protected from the enemy's guns. But a puff of wind shifted their relative positions, and passed on, leaving her fully exposed to the frigate's broadside.

Several Turks were looking over the rail, curious, but as yet unsuspecting. They even lowered a boat and sent a line to the visitor, with which Decatur's men, still concealed, brought the two yet closer together. It was only when the Turks caught sight of the *Intrepid's* anchors that they learned they had been duped. A sharp order to keep off was followed by the panic-stricken cry "Amerikanos!" as a last strong pull brought her alongside, and men heretofore in hiding swarmed over the rail. The Turks gave way. Some rushed below, some jumped into the sea. In ten minutes Decatur was in possession, and soon the *Philadelphia* was in flames.

She burned like tinder; so rapidly, indeed, that the Americans had barely time to escape from the fire they had kindled. For a breathless moment the lines of the two ships were entangled, and the *Intrepid*, jammed against the burning frigate, seemed in danger of sharing the fate of her adversary. A sword-stroke cut her hawser, and a vigorous push sent her out of harm's way as the flames leaned hungrily toward her, then leaped hissing up the *Philadelphia's* rigging.

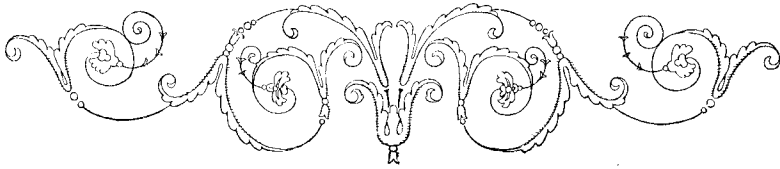
A cheer burst from the Americans. Until then they had worked almost in silence, too absorbed to make unnecessary sounds. The Turks, on their part, had seemed as

paralyzed in voice as in resistance. But the American shout woke noise everywhere. Turkish batteries, the corsairs, and a galley all sent a rain of shot after the *Intrepid* as she sped out of the harbor, her pathway lighted by the burning frigate. Even the *Philadelphia's* guns, heated by the fire, began to explode, one broadside discharging itself toward the town, as if in revenge for Turkish indignities, the other toward a guarding fort.

This exploit and others as dramatic brought the war in 1805 to an end satisfactory to European commerce, and laid

the foundation for that confidence in our navy, closely akin to vainglory, which a century of experience has only intensified in American breasts. Its picturesque successes doubtless had much to do with the light-heartedness with which the country went to war with England in 1812. During that struggle the Barbary pirates again began harassing American ships, but when the end of hostilities released our navy for other duty, Decatur, now become an admiral, returned to the scene of his early exploit and speedily and finally convinced them of the error of their ways.

(To be continued)



## Peace

By MARGARET WIDDEMER

ALL my days are clear again and gentle with forgetting,  
Mornings cool with graciousness of time passed stilly by,  
Evenings sweet with call of birds and lilac-rose sunseting,  
And starshine does not hurt my heart, nor night winds make me cry.

I can tie a ribbon now, nor hope of your eyes' pleasure  
Makes its hue intolerable if you come not to see;  
I can hear old music now, nor stabbing through its measure  
Come the thoughts I would not have or tears that need not be.

All my days are placid now, as quiet children slowly  
Pacing through a leaf-locked way that has not vale or hill;  
Peace again and mirth again, and dawns and evens holy—  
*I wish I had your hands in mine and heartbreak still!*

